

Becoming official in Ukraine: A true story

25 February, 18:04

When my friend from Germany visited me in Kyiv some years ago, he brought with him an interesting souvenir from Hamburg – a book called “Culture Shock! Ukraine.”

He bought it out of curiosity and to amuse me, rather than to be prepared for the possible shocks. Throughout his two-week stay, he saw nothing that could justify the ridiculous name of the guidebook. However, I have to admit that surely there are things in Kyiv and the rest of Ukraine that can easily shock foreigners. Local officials definitely top the chart of the scariest things in Ukraine. And if you decide to stay here for some time, you will inevitably face them sooner or later.

According to the law, residents of the European Union, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, Turkey and Japan, can enter Ukraine without a visa. All you need to bring is your ID. The stamp you get in your passport upon arrival in Boryspil airport, for example, allows you to freely remain in the country for up to 90 days. However if you decide to stay longer, you will be required to register with one of the local departments for visas and registrations, also known as OVIR.

Make sure to do this on time, otherwise you will get fined. The fine can be up to Hr 1,700. You won't be able to leave the country without paying it. It is best to show up at OVIR about two weeks before the term of your visa runs out because it can be a long, drawn out and bureaucratic process.

To register with OVIR, the authorities will require you to produce a proof of your domestic place of residence, an official address where you are staying, be it an apartment whose owner is willing to officially enlist you as his lodger, or a hotel. It's good to keep this in mind when you're looking for a place to rent. Many landlords will not approve of officially registering you as a resident because it is not in their interest to pay tax on income they get from renting out their flats. Basically, you can register at any apartment in the city, even if you are not really staying there. So, one option is to ask help from a friend willing register you as a resident staying at their place free of charge.

The registration process is very Soviet-style. It seems as if the officials do everything possible to complicate the process. Some employees at OVIR offices in Kyiv simply refuse to pick up their phone. While trying to help out a friend in sifting through the complicated registration process, I tried to reach Obolon OVIR by phone to confirm what was needed ahead of time. But all the while the phone was either busy or no one was picking up. So the only way to learn the working hours of the place was to go there and read a sign outside the entrance.

Even if you come at the right time, don't expect to complete the application in one go. Indeed, some of the documents can be prepared in advance. Those are: a copy of the apartment owner's passport, a copy of your own passport and an immigration card (a

form you filled out when entering Ukraine), two photographs and a medical insurance policy, which gives you coverage in Ukraine, usually an agreement with the Ukrinmedstrakh company which costs about Hr 182 for 90 days.

At OVIR, a clerk will also give you account numbers for all the fees you need to cover. Typically, they charge Hr 29.90 for their services and Hr 17 tax. You will also have to fill out a registration form. When I got the latter and left the room of the somewhat hostile or just indifferent official, the process began to feel more and more Kafkaesque.

The form couldn't be filled in by hand. It had to be done by a typist. Once we tracked down the typist, she gave us another receipt for a tiny sum, which we could not pay directly to her or any cashier in the building. Neither could we go to any of the nearby banks. It had to be the state bank, Oshchadbank. The downside of paying in Oshchadbank is that it's likely to have a long queue of, either pensioners collecting their monthly handouts or citizens to pay their bills. You can spend half an hour or more waiting.

As it turned out, the time in line was needed. I struggled to fill in all the forms, because OVIR simply did not give clear instructions on how to do this. Also, I had to note my tax number which I didn't bring along. Luckily, a cashier accepted the receipts as they were, though she was decidedly grumpy about the whole thing.

Once we got back to the typist with the receipt, she did her job promptly. But it wasn't over yet. The next step was to take the registration form to the local ZHEK, or communal housing services office in the region where the foreigner will be residing. As it turned out, we also needed their signature and stamp. Why? Well, it is sort of a leftover from the Soviet days. The authorities need to know who is residing where.

Considering that ZHEK is likely to be located quite far from OVIR, and that the two organizations often have different working hours (as it was in my case), prepare for a long and complicated process that may take up to one week. Once your documents are accepted, they will be processed for another week. Upon your request, OVIR may issue you a document which claims that your passport is being held by their office during this period. The latter will come in handy in case you get stopped by police. Ukrainian laws, after all, require foreigners to carry their passports at all times.

You can, of course, save yourself all this trouble and pay a firm specializing in the process to do all the dirty work involved in registering with OVIR. They charge about Hr 1,000-1,600, plus the cost of insurance, which depends on how long the foreigner will reside in Ukraine.

Some of the companies can even provide you with an "official" address for registration, if you don't have one. However, you will still have to accompany a representative of the firm to OVIR. So it may be sensible to save money, ask a daring friend for help, and pay him back with a drink or dinner, during which you can blow off steam or laugh off the stresses of the process you both had to go through.

See the full list of Kyiv OVIRs at
http://city.ukr.net/kyev/gosuchrezhdenija_gosorgany/oviry/index.html

Registration services:

Uvito.com.ua

21 Prorizna. Office No.5, 279-6521

legal-rud.com.ua

10 Lunacharskoho, ap. 11, 38-095-5792402

Legal Supermarket

15 Lva Tolstoho, office No. 22, 287-3864

www.rezultat.com.ua

Contact us Copyright © 2000 -2008 "Bigmir-Internet".All rights protected by Ukrainian laws.